

ISRAEL'S LEFT REELS TO THE SHOCK OF "PRAGUE"

Chronicle of a Disillusionment

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RUMORS in Israel for months and weeks had the Slansky trial starting so many times before it actually did that it came almost as an anticlimax. Many Jews appeared to be among the accused, but nothing extraordinary was seen in that: there had been trials with Jews and trials without them before in the countries behind the Iron Curtain. Trials and purges had come to be accepted as things integral to the Soviet order, the way economic crises are regarded as inherent in the capitalist system by orthodox Marxists. True, articles had been written and speeches made in Israel about the growth of a new form of anti-Semitism in East Europe, but this had been generally considered an exaggeration—if not worse. Even if it was true that Jews could no longer enter the Soviet diplomatic service or become generals in the Soviet army—so what? It had been that way under the czars too.

But Mapam, the pro-Soviet party which in 1951 won 15 out of 120 seats in the general election, had a special reason for concern: ten months before, Mordecai Oren, one of the leaders of the extreme left wing of that party, had been arrested in Prague. According to persistent rumors, he was to figure in the forthcoming trial as the missing link between the

Czech "traitors" and Zionism. There was serious disquiet in Mizra, Oren's home kibbutz, and among a few of the more thoughtful Mapam leaders, who grasped the implications of his arrest before their more optimistic comrades did. But even they were not prepared for anything extreme; there had been somewhat similar occurrences in the past, and these had been forgotten in time.

In the Kostov trial in Bulgaria in 1949, Mark Nahimson, a lawyer, had been named as an important British Intelligence agent in the Balkans who had established conspiratorial connections with Stefanov, former Bulgarian Finance Minister and one of the chief defendants. It is not unlikely that the secret police chiefs who prepared this trial believed that Nahimson, like so many other European Jews, had been killed in the course of the war; but Nahimson, his name changed to Nahumi, had meanwhile become foreign editor of *Al Hamishmar*, the Mapam daily in Tel Aviv. Though his naming in the Sofia trial caused a sensation, Nahimson himself did not react. Three years later this "British spy" was still functioning on the board of the Mapam paper, and still making speeches at meetings of the Israeli-Soviet League that were duly reported in the Communist press, which apparently saw nothing wrong in giving publicity to a British Intelligence agent.

IN LAST month's COMMENTARY it was reported how the grass-roots Israelis of the Ain Harod collective colony, most of whose members had strong ideological or sentimental ties with the "great Russian experiment," took the news of the Prague trial and the arrest of the Moscow physicians. This month MARK ALEXANDER gives us a broader view of the Israeli left's reaction to the new anti-Semitic campaign behind the Iron Curtain, describing, step by step, the various contortions the hierarchy of the minority fellow-traveling Mapam party has gone through as the evidence of Soviet Jew-baiting piled up during the past months. "Mark Alexander" is the pseudonym of a young journalist who lives in Israel and specializes in Middle Eastern affairs. He has been a frequent contributor to these pages.

BUT on this particular *erev Shabbat* afternoon, November 21, news of a different kind began to arrive in Israel. The Prague trial had started the day before, and it had been noted that the indictment mentioned the Jewish origins of most of the accused and the fact that they had "protected" Jewish organizations. On the 21st it was discovered that the Czech radio was broadcasting the court proceedings for several hours straight every day. Not a few Jews from Czechoslovakia are in Israel, and the number of those who understand Czech—through Polish or some other Slavonic language—is even larger. Listening to the Prague radio became for a while the favorite pastime of

a good part of the Israeli population, while lesser linguists turned to Kol Israel, the Israeli broadcasting station, for information.

By *Shabbat*, the 22nd, the news was sensational—and very bad. Everything pointed to the fact that an official attempt was being made by a Communist regime to exploit anti-Semitism—to divert attention from domestic troubles, or for some other reason. Not a single one of the defendants had been a Zionist; most of them had actually fought Zionism bitterly for years. It became clear that “Zionist” was being used as a synonym for “Jew.” Though some Jewish Communists refused to believe this, their non-Jewish comrades, in Israel and elsewhere, were much quicker to grasp the new party line.

Large crowds pressed around the radios in cafés and restaurants, and in the dining halls of the kibbutzim. The latest news from Prague became the sole topic of conversation. By eight or nine on Sunday morning, and on subsequent days, most newspapers were sold out.

The first official comment on the trial came from Kol Israel station on Saturday, the third day of the trial; the commentator pointed out the striking resemblance between the accusations made against “world Jewry” in the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” and the charges made at Prague. This frank comparison was a far cry, indeed, from the usual restraint shown in official Israeli reactions to Soviet events, and it became obvious as the day passed that citizens of Israel looked to their government for an unambiguous answer to this new attack on the Jews.

PUBLIC interest was also focused, as could be expected, on the reactions of Mapam and the Communists. *Al Hamishmar*, the Mapam paper, stated editorially on Sunday that “the accusations leveled at the Prague trial against one of our members, Mr. M. Oren, and against Zionism, have caused widespread astonishment among those faithful to pioneering Zionism and revolutionary socialism. Mapam, which considers itself part of the world revolutionary camp, and supports without reservation the socialist states and People’s Democracies in their struggle against internal and external enemies, cannot accept in any way the tenor of the things said against Oren at the trial of Slansky and his associates. We do not doubt the socialist and revolutionary loyalty of Mr. Oren and his deep friendship for

the socialist countries. If the first and incomplete versions that have reached us over the radio are true, then we are facing a serious attempt to smear an innocent man and the liberation movement of a persecuted people deserving of favorable treatment and sympathy from the builders of the new world.”

This was on Sunday, and Mapam did not have long to wait for complete versions of the charges against Oren. He appeared in the Prague courtroom in person and confessed to having spied for the British Intelligence Service ever since 1934. The Prague radio announcer described Oren as an international criminal who looked like an apache. This made it somewhat difficult for Mapam to insist on their theory of some inexplicable “misfortune” that had befallen their comrade, and during most of the week the Mapam leaders were unavailable for comment—they simply could not be reached. But it was at least known that they were utterly bewildered: the “astonishment” mentioned in *Al Hamishmar*’s editorial was one of the understatements of the century.

A meeting of Mapam’s central committee was held, at which, by a majority of twenty-five, it was voted to follow a policy calling for Oren’s immediate release and undertaking a partial defense of the Jews, the Zionist movement, and Israel. At the same time Mapam was to reaffirm its support of the Communist world and its solidarity with it against the “anti-Communist propaganda wave” called forth by the Prague trial. A minority of nine, however, demanded total identification with the new Cominform line, an all-out attack on the Zionist movement, a justification of Oren’s arrest on the basis of his own “voluntary” evidence, and a support of the anti-Semitic attacks—or rather a denial of the allegations that these actually were anti-Semitic.

During the same week Mapam issued two further statements of policy: in the Knesset, on Tuesday, November 26, Peri, a Mapam deputy, read aloud a short prepared statement directed mainly against the “anti-Communist smear campaign,” and an *Al Hamishmar* editorial criticized *Rude Pravo*, the main Czech Communist party paper, for having failed in its wholesale condemnation of the Jewish liberation movement to differentiate between the “progressive” and “reactionary” forces that are contained, the editorial insisted, in every national movement.

But Mapam’s chief initial reaction was to

try to defend itself against Mapai, Israel's strongly anti-Communist labor party and the biggest single political force in the country. Mapam had not yet digested the full implications of the Prague trial, and still saw the chief threat as an anti-Mapam "crusade" by Mapai and other Israeli parties. Its fifteen deputies sat silent in the Knesset, though everybody was expecting some official explanation of their position. "You will not intimidate us!" shouted one of their moderates, and this was typical of how much at sea they all were. Perhaps the speeches and articles against them were too sharply personal; perhaps some of their opponents overdid the I-told-you-so's; perhaps a hand of reconciliation ought to have been extended in a dramatic gesture. Yet it is hard to assume that the result would have been much different. Mapam had been shaken to its spiritual foundations.

Meanwhile the names of two more prominent Mapam figures had been implicated in the Communist anti-Israel campaign. Rafael Ben Shalom (Friedel), a member of Kibbutz Artzi, one of the heroes of the Slovakian uprising in 1944, and first secretary of the Israel Legation in Prague in 1949, was called an American spy in the Prague trial—which he, in the safety of Israel, denied in a private statement. Y. Barzilai, a member of Kibbutz Negba and former Israeli Ambassador to Warsaw, was indirectly implicated in an official Polish note to the Israeli government asking for the recall of his successor as Ambassador to Poland.

In December Mapam convened to decide more fully what its reaction to Prague was to be. Its out-and-out pro-Stalinist wing, headed by Sneh and Riftin, was outvoted by 232 to 49. Sneh had welcomed the Prague trial as an important contribution to world peace: Czechoslovakia had been threatened by a Titoist *coup*, and Gottwald, or whoever directed his steps, had had to act accordingly. Sneh's views were set forth in a leading article destined for the party newspaper, but which the latter refused to print, whereupon Sneh circulated it privately. The article eventually found its way into the Mapai newspaper, and the Tel Aviv Communist sheet as well. Sneh did not in this article elaborate on the Jewish aspect of the Prague trial, nor did he mention Oren's name; anti-Semitism on the part of a Communist regime was a *contradictio in adjecto*, therefore unthinkable and *a priori* a lie, was his position.

EARLY in December Kibbutz Hameuhad (the organization of agricultural collectives whose inner struggles over the Prague development were described by Aleph V. Sherman in last month's COMMENTARY) held a meeting. Most of the speakers called for the expulsion of those who still defended the Prague trials. Even more important was a Kibbutz Artzi* meeting in Sarid, early in January 1953, at which it was decided to "purge" from central positions in the party's institutions all those who had voted with Dr. Sneh.

And on January 9 Sneh's group was for the first time openly charged with "deviations" in a lengthy article by Meir Ya'ari, the ideological leader of Hashomer Hatzair, in *Al Hamishmar*. Sneh's first "deviation," according to the writer, had been his denial of the anti-Jewish character of the Prague trial and his refusal to acknowledge that stress had been laid upon the Jewish origins of the defendants. Ya'ari rejected every effort to make a distinction between the Zionist movement as thoroughly reactionary, and an imaginary "Jewish national liberation movement." He maintained that Mapam was right in collaborating with "reformist" and "bourgeois" Zionists in the Executive of the Jewish Agency to promote immigration, land settlement, and *halutz* education, while at the same time opposing all "reactionary" trends in Zionism. He recalled that the deep ideological split between Communism and proletarian Zionism had never been bridged; he said further that, even if Mapam were to succeed in replacing the present government of Israel and in keeping her neutral between East and West, there would still be difficulties because the Jewish people were *sui generis*, dispersed in the East as well as the West, and therefore an easy target for suspicion. Ya'ari closed his article with a stern warning to Sneh and his friends not to play the role of "revolutionaries" in a "non-revolutionary party," and to recant their "deviations."

But the situation was not so unfavorable to Sneh as it appeared. In the first place, Mapam's rejection of the Prague trial was not entirely unambiguous. In the second place, it

*Kibbutz Artzi is, like Kibbutz Hameuhad, a federation of agricultural collectives. The two together contribute the greater portion of the membership of Mapam. Kibbutz Artzi is organized politically as Hashomer Hatzair, one of three parties that originally came together some years ago to create Mapam.—ED.

mattered little to him that Ya'ari and his friends in Hashomer Hatzair were angry. Would he not be remembered by the Cominform for his brave stand in a difficult time? And was not his position much more logical ideologically as long as Mapam's majority refused, as they did, to renounce the basic tenets of Stalinism?

THE Communists, too, were visibly shaken by Prague. Their newspaper did not react definitely for almost a week—that is, it didn't discuss any of the details of the trial, but contented itself with crying out against the "yellow hyenas" that were launching an anti-Communist drive, and welcomed the trial in general terms. But after ten days or so, following a report by one of their leaders, Wilner, to the party's central committee (Mikunis, the secretary-general of the Israeli Communist party, was away in Moscow), they began to go to work on the anti-Zionist, anti-Israeli, and anti-Jewish tasks set them by Prague, while still trying to deny that anything more than anti-Zionism was involved.

Mikunis, on his return from Moscow, declared in a meeting at Ramle that only on the ruins of Zionism could Communism be built in Israel. The Communist newspaper omitted that part of his speech, but it was given in *Al Hamishmar*. On the next day, in a special interview, Mikunis admitted that he had said what *Al Hamishmar* reported, but criticized the paper for printing a statement so obviously made off the record.

THE Prague trial dissipated for the time being that "neutralist" atmosphere which had infected Israel's political climate until then (as described by this author in "Israel's Communists and Fellow-Travelers" in the August 1952 COMMENTARY). The many unattached and largely unpolitical Israelis were, of course, more shocked than the "premature" anti-Communists, who had already predicted an anti-Semitic turn in East Europe. Exposed to both sides of the "argument," the neutrals had decided that the truth lay somewhere in the middle. Now all they could say was, "Who would ever have expected that! Didn't the Communists tell us over and over again that anti-Semitism was punished as a serious crime in the Soviet world?" I heard this a thousand times if I heard it once.

Many Israelis tried to rationalize the affair:

perhaps the Communists wanted to make friends with Shishakly and Naguib. But this by itself did not make enough sense. The Mapam leaders and activists tried at all costs to avoid discussing Prague, but when driven into a corner they said that anti-Semitism was after all unthinkable under a Communist regime, and if facts showed otherwise, maybe the facts were wrong—it might be just a coincidence that eight of the eleven accused were Jews. But hadn't the prosecutor declared in so many words that the presence of so many Jews among the defendants was *not* accidental? The Communists had less squirming to do. "We've always been against Zionism," they said, "and it's against Zionism that Prague has now gone to war." This was a more logical line, but it was somewhat handicapped by the fact that, though eight of the Prague defendants were Jews, none was a Zionist. (And later, when news came of the arrest of the Moscow physicians, there was hardly any mention of Zionism.)

Both Mapam and the Communists tried in general to pass over the Prague trial as quickly as possible and divert attention to such issues as the Rosenberg case in America, the high cost of living, and the policies of Israel's new coalition government. The Communists called about a dozen public meetings on Prague, half of which were broken up by the public. Mapam called no such meetings at all. But the attempt to dodge a clear stand (not only on Prague but also on Zionism and Israel) made sense only on assumption that the issues raised by Prague were transient—that "this storm, too, would pass over," as *Al Hamishmar* put it very frankly and naively. But what if this should not be the case, what if Oren were brought to trial and implicated other Mapam leaders, and what if more anti-Jewish purges took place in other Communist countries? Publicly, at least, Mapam refused to consider such eventualities.

Then came news of the expulsion of the Israeli ambassadors to Prague and Warsaw; a new purge began in East Germany, with the flight of practically all Jewish community leaders there; and the Communist press attacked Bonn's reparations agreement with Israel. But the worst shock was the announcement from Moscow on January 13 of the arrest of the Jewish physicians and of the fantastic charges against them. The reaction was in most respects like that to Prague, but

more intense. The Communists wholeheartedly defended the new anti-Jewish line, while maintaining that it contained no anti-Semitic intention whatsoever. Mapam said, after some hesitation, that this latest news was really "astonishing" and even "shocking," and that this attempt to "throw a dark shadow over the Jewish national movement must of course be rejected." However, continued *Al Hamishmar*, one should not draw hasty conclusions or become hysterical: recent developments were to be explained in the last resort as a result of growing world tension. And for the growth of world tension, as every Mapam follower knew, America, not the Soviet Union, was responsible.

It was all very well to go on shouting the old slogans about the impossibility of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, but the new facts were harder than ever to explain. The Communists were by now completely isolated; their Arab cells were hardly affected, but there was dissension in their Jewish ones, and slowly but unmistakably a trend away from the party began. Many Israelis had tried to believe that Prague was only an isolated incident, but after "Moscow" that hope had evaporated. All the false ideas and illusory notions about Stalinism that had been so popular in Israel since 1948 were now being destroyed. The Communists would never again get so favorable a hearing from any large proportion of Israelis.

THE fact was that "Prague" and "Moscow" hit home directly and even individually, more than any similar event in the past. "I'm not very much afraid of purges, the decisive thing is *who* is to be purged. If it's *me*, then it's of course something entirely different." This statement, by a leader of Mapam's pro-Zionist wing, S. Friedman, was fairly typical of the reaction of most Soviet sympathizers. Who could know the truth about Bukharin and Radek, Rajk and Kostov, in far-off countries? But Mordecai Oren and Rafi Ben Shalom had been their comrades only yesterday; if they were spies, then anybody could be one. But, of course, everyone knew that they were *not* spies. For those who knew Oren and Ben Shalom, the personal aspect seemed to be even more important than the charges against Zionism, Israel, and the Jews in general.

But if Oren was innocent, if his evidence was framed, what reason was there to exclude

the possibility that Slansky and the others were in the same position? Was it only the fact, as Ben Gurion put it, that Slansky had the misfortune not to belong to Kibbutz Mizra? The Communists accused Mapam of sowing disbelief and confusion, and from their own point of view they were quite right. They were only arguing in accordance with the advice of that great master of totalitarian propaganda, Adolf Hitler: "As soon as one point is removed from the sphere of dogmatic certainty, the discussion may easily lead to endless debates and general confusion." In the end the Oren debate could only undermine the rank and file's confidence in Stalinism as a whole.

Privately, many—perhaps most—of the Israelis who defended Prague admitted that the confessions could not be taken at face value, and tried to find a more refined and sophisticated explanation: they upheld the accusations only in an abstract sense, while rejecting them literally. This was, of course, not an entirely novel procedure on the part of Soviet sympathizers. Nobody, however, could believe any longer in the absolute benefits of Stalinism; those who wanted to swallow Prague could say only that they thought the good in Stalinism outweighed the bad. Here the basic difference between Stalin's Communism and faiths with more solid moral standards became all too plain.

One had to differentiate, however, between the attitude of the Mapam leaders and that of the rank and file. The Sneh wing consists mainly of party functionaries, with perhaps a few hundred followers in the kibbutzim and Tel Aviv. Yet half of Mapam's Knesset representation and perhaps a majority of its party bureaucracy belonged to that wing before Prague. The predisposition to cynicism—and contempt for the "masses"—was patently much more frequent in Mapam's leadership than among its rank and file. The leaders of the Sneh wing said of Prague and Moscow: "Of course, we know it isn't true. But, of course, we have to justify it. That kind of propaganda is needed because the masses can't understand the niceties of deviation."

But the rank and file kept on asking: "How can we know the truth? Perhaps there are secrets that cannot be told?"

THERE was no mass exodus from Mapam or the Communist Maki after Prague. One or two Mapam intellectuals like Haim Guri, the fa-

vorite poet of the younger generation, spoke out in public. Others could not afford the publicity; it was only the rank and file that could go to protest meetings or sign protest declarations.

But such shocks, we know from the past, generally have a cumulative and delayed effect. Very few left the Communist party after the first Moscow trials, but considerably more did so, and for apparently minor reasons, between the spring of 1938 and the summer of 1939. Outside observers were frequently baffled: why should one strain at a gnat after having swallowed camels for so many years? But leaving the Communist party is usually not the result of a single, sudden decision, but rather of a long process in the course of which several shocks have to be assimilated.

One should not belittle the dilemma of those whose faith in Stalin Communism had been shaken after Prague. In the last resort it was a question of choosing between right and wrong, but one's *whole* life was involved, and not just one sphere of it. For the man in the kibbutz such a political decision meant that he had to leave and go look elsewhere for a job, a house, friends. Even in town and village one's whole way of life would be affected by such a step, for pro-Stalinism has become a way of life everywhere.

THE Sneh-Riftin faction in Mapam is now called the "opportunist" wing of the party, which describes its position more accurately than any other name it ever bore. Its leaders believe in Stalinism in much the same way that many German intellectuals in the 1930's believed in the "forces that are rising," and therefore did not have much time to spare for the forces that were sinking. "Ideological" Stalinists could be shaken by Prague and Moscow, but not the believers in power and toughness—because Communist power was not necessarily affected by such episodes. Here, again, we face a striking resemblance between fascism and Stalinism as regards the attraction that power and success have for both the intellectual and non-intellectual. Sneh and his fellows will not be intellectually persuaded or emotionally shaken; only the failure of Stalinism will do that.

But most of the Mapam and many of the Maki rank and file haven't reached the point where brute success is their only consideration, as is shown by their response to Prague

and Moscow. Soon they will be disconsolately looking for a new faith. A. Ofer, a well-known young Mapam writer, wrote in the Histadrut daily, *Davar*, that one ought not deprive the Mapam youth of their faith in the socialist and progressive character of the Soviet regime lest they cease to be idealists and lose faith in everything. Rarely has the situation of these young people been defined so straightforwardly. Their old faith is crumbling and they would be ready to accept a new one, but only if, like Stalinism, it was an all-embracing secular religion that answered every question. They are much more interested in security and peace of mind than in independent thinking or questing for the truth.

But where is the new faith to come from? Religion, as represented by ossified traditionalism, has no appeal for them, nor do they feel attracted by the crude chauvinism of the ultra-nationalist Herut. The General Zionists are "bad capitalists" and wicked "exploiters"; class interests would divide them from this party in any case. There remains Mapai with its democratic socialism, but where and when in the world was ever a younger generation enthusiastic about democratic socialism? In the weeks after Prague a drive was started to "save" the Mapam and Communist youth, but it is doubtful whether the missionaries will be able to give them what they are looking for.

II

IN THE small hours of the morning of January 29, the Mapam party council, in prolonged session in the Histadrut house in Petah Tikva, decided by a majority of 228 to 22 to expel Moshe Sneh, Adolf Berman—another Knesset deputy—and Pinhas Tubin, Tel Aviv municipal council member.

Before Prague and Moscow, Mapam had been divided roughly into two parts: Ahdut Avoda (Labor Unity) and Hasit Halikud (Unity Front). Ahdut Avoda, it was generally assumed, could count on the support of about 35 to 40 per cent of Mapam's membership; it stressed the Zionist character of Mapam and, while anti-Western and "neutralist," was sharply opposed to the Israeli Communist party and refused any form of collaboration with it.

Hasit Halikud had come into being as the strongest faction in Mapam during 1951 and 1952 through a coalition between the left socialist Hashomer Hatzair and an urban pro-

Cominform group headed by Dr. Sneh. At first this new faction was dominated by the old leaders of Hashomer Hatzair—Meir Ya'ari, Ya'akov Hasan, Mordecai Bentov, and others. But gradually control passed into the hands of Sneh, who rode on the swelling tide of pro-Soviet sympathy.

On the eve of Prague, Sneh, as leader of its largest faction, was in virtual control of Mapam. But the first manifestations of Stalin's new anti-Jewish line reversed that trend. Ahdut Avoda demanded, in what amounted to an ultimatum, that the party publish a vigorous protest. Sneh countered with the demand that Mapam identify itself completely with the Prague and Moscow line and give up its Zionist character once and for all. But he had already lost his old majority in Hasit Halikud; most of the Hashomer Hatzair people had had their second thoughts in the interim. The Hashomer Hatzair leaders declared in their paper that they would not abandon *halutz* Zionism, that they would remain loyal to the "world of revolution and socialism," but that they would also defend the Jewish "national liberation movement" against attacks from any quarter.

THERE was little change through the second half of December and into January. Then Hasan and Ya'ari decided to act. The executive of Hashomer Hatzair was convened and the old principle of "*kollektiviut rayonit*"—the ideological unity of the kibbutzim—was put to test. After a discussion lasting for several days, it was decided to take a vote in all kibbutzim whose result would be binding on both majority and minority. The vote was held and Ya'ari and Hasan won a resounding majority of about 90 per cent, with only three kibbutzim, all of them young and small, giving a majority to Sneh—and these three "recanted" a few days afterward. The subsequent reshuffle of Mapam's leadership saw Sneh's relatively numerous supporters in the party machine supplanted by Ya'ari and Hasan men. And now Sneh was also deserted by Peri, Riftin, and Rubin—all three of them Knesset delegates—old supporters who were not ready, however, to follow him all the way into organizational merger with the Israeli Communist party. Sneh's retort was to announce, on January 20, the formation of a new faction in Mapam: *Hativat Hasmol*, or Left Brigade.

The published program of this new group

simply repeated the Communist program; the word "Zionism" appeared but once in its platform, and then only in connection with the urgent necessity of Mapam's leaving the Zionist executive. Even now Sneh still expected, apparently, that a third, or at least a quarter, of Mapam would join his faction and be prepared, if necessary, to walk out of the organization. Sneh's main hope, however, was for the support of the Arabs in Mapam, who were organized in a separate group, and for that of Hativa Zeira, the Mapam urban youth organization. At this point Ya'ari and Hasan agreed with Ahdut Avoda to expel the Snehists from Mapam. But first these were asked to return their Knesset mandates and dissolve their new faction. When they refused to comply, the leading members of their group were expelled by the Mapam central committee on January 26, the decision being reaffirmed by a ten-to-one majority of the party council three days later.

A week or two showed that it had been very unwise of Sneh to let his bluff be called. Only two of Mapam's Knesset deputies stuck by him—Adolf Berman, the colorless brother of Polish Communist leader Ya'akov Berman, was one of them. He had been elected to the Knesset more by mistake than anything else; his chief claim to fame lay in the fact that he had joined in the Communist attack on the Joint Distribution Committee at the very moment when he was asking for, and receiving, from that same organization a loan of several thousand dollars with which to buy a flat in Tel Aviv!

Sneh's other last-ditch supporter was Rustum Bustuni, a likable young Arab from Haifa, who had been elected to the Knesset on the Mapam ticket. But contrary to all expectations, most of the several hundred Arabs who constituted Hativa Aravit, the Arab section of Mapam, did not follow Bustuni. The Mapam urban youth section, Hativa Zeira, on the other hand, after having been disbanded by Mapam's leadership, decided ten days later, at its conference in Tel Aviv on February 7, to go along with Sneh under a new name, "Youth Group Yizhak Sadeh" (Sadeh, a founder of Palmach, had died in 1952).

Whereas in November 1952 Dr. Sneh had had virtual control of Mapam, by February he headed no more than a small splinter group that amounted to rather less than 10 per cent of Mapam's membership. And even this group

has begun to disintegrate, with some of its members returning to Mapam, and others, in their impatience, abandoning Sneh and joining the Stalinists outright.

THE news, reaching Israel on February 8, that Sneh himself had been named in Prague as the former head of the "Zionist-Jewish intelligence service" was but one more blow to him; it began to look doubtful whether his group would be able to survive very long in its present form.

It would appear that Sneh actually expressed the wish to enter the Communist party, but he had little left to bargain with for a position of influence there, and the Communists showed no interest at all in a fusion. According to Cominform plans, Sneh was to head a fellow-traveling "national front" group that would be less rigidly Marxist than the Communists and able to attract elements beyond their own reach. Though not the slightest difference of opinion between Maki and Sneh's group could be discerned, *Kol Ha'am*, Maki's paper, tried for a while to invent "ideological" ones to justify Sneh's continued existence as a separate political force. But Sneh himself did not like the role assigned him one bit. His ambition was to be more, not less, of an orthodox Stalinist than Mikunis and Wilner. Besides, he had by now become so closely identified with the Communists as to be of little use to them merely as a "fellow-traveler." And another handicap was that he had also become the most hated man on the left in Israel—hated, not like Mikunis and Wilner, the Communist party's leaders, who had been, after all, anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist for years, but as a renegade.

Dr. Sneh has failed because the new anti-Semitic policy of the Soviet Union and her satellites puts him in an untenable position. He and a few other Israelis can continue to defend this policy, but they will appeal only to Jews with a very developed capacity for self-hatred. There have been such Jews in every generation: there were Jewish informers at many ritual murder trials, and Dr. Naumann's National German-Jewish Association in Berlin even hailed Hitler's victory in 1933. But Sneh cannot possibly hope to attract many people in Israel on such a basis.

IT OUGHT not be assumed that Mapam itself has wholly abandoned Stalinism as a result of Prague, Moscow, and the rest. On the con-

trary, it has been trying during the last month to demonstrate that it is much more truly Stalinist than either Sneh or Maki, and its main charge against the former is that he is really a Trotskyite and Titoist! Mapam affirms that it is as faithful as ever to the "world of revolution, peace, and progress," and that the present misunderstanding would somehow be cleared away if only they could state their case directly to the "leaders of world revolution." In all this the Mapamnicks appear for the moment to be sincere, still fortified as they are by their past success in closing their eyes to Stalinist reality.

But what will happen when they are attacked for being bourgeois nationalists and enemies of the "world of revolution"—as they inevitably will be—by more authoritative spokesmen of Communism than Sneh or Mikunis? In the beginning, like the Yugoslavs in 1948, they will not dare to fight back. Then they will gradually begin to realize that their position is utterly hopeless as regards Moscow. Yet they will probably need even more time to wake up to this than the Yugoslavs did—for the simple reason that the latter had no alternative but the gallows in remaining loyal to Moscow, while Mapam, being farther away from the blessings of the MVD and the MGB, and not having yet succeeded in installing a "People's Democracy" in Israel, will be able to go on burying their heads in the safe Israeli sand.

The Communists' own crisis, meanwhile, though less spectacular than Mapam's, has been just as deep. Most of Maki's "cadres" have stayed intact, but the greater part of its "sympathizers" have walked out. As the party was based, politically, organizationally, and financially, on these "sympathizers," this has meant a serious setback and a much narrower basis of support. And even among its several hundred inner "cadres," breaches have appeared. The Israeli Communist party in February was in the position of a boxer who, after having already absorbed a lot of punishment, suddenly is hit hard from behind by his own manager.

III

THE Israeli government was taken unawares by the bomb explosion at the Soviet Legation in Tel Aviv, but it was even more surprised by the Kremlin's decision to break diplomatic relations. About forty members of the rabble-rousing Anti-Communist League were

immediately arrested, only to be released in a few days for lack of evidence. Moreover, these arrestees denied their guilt vehemently, which was in flat contradiction to terrorist tradition of former years when "credit" for such acts was always claimed by at least one organization.

The Israeli public believed, almost as one, that the bomb had been planted either by the Russians themselves, or by Maki's underground apparatus. But there are no facts whatever that point to the Communists. However, no evidence was found against the Anti-Communist League *despite an investigation*, while there was none against the Communists because the Israeli police did not question a single Communist functionary. Without question, a secret apparatus exists inside the Israeli Communist party, as inside every other Communist party. Thus, in January 1950, two of Maki's members were given long prison sentences for having military secrets in their possession. Nevertheless, the police, for unknown reasons, acted on the assumption that the bombing of the Legation had been done by self-styled anti-Communists.

The Communists drew encouragement from the government's reluctance to investigate their possible part in the bombing. They interpreted this as a sign of weakness, and saw a chance to stage a come-back. A few days later, in collaboration with Sneh's group, they launched a propaganda counter-offensive of unprecedented violence. In many meetings throughout the country they and their stooges accused the government itself of having organized the bombing. Mikunis, the party secretary, and other Communist speakers even ventured to utter threats—Ben Gurion and all his fellow "criminals" in the government would one day pay dearly for their crimes: they would be hanged by the feet like Mussolini, or incinerated like Hitler. As the government failed to react, Maki became even bolder. These tactics did not increase Maki's popularity, but it was again on the offensive and for the time being had regained its hold over its own members.

Before the bombing it had seemed as though Kol Ha'am's chief Tel Aviv correspondent, who had left the party in protest against Prague and Moscow, would be followed by many others in the cadres. But the government's indecision gave the party a new lease on life and many of its members were dissuaded, for the time being, from leaving.

MEANWHILE the polemics between Mapam and Dr. Sneh grew much fiercer. Renan has observed in his *Life of Jesus* that the bitterest quarrels in the world were those of Jews among themselves. Mapam was at a disadvantage from the first because it tried to out-do Sneh in Stalinist fervor, while calling a temporary truce with the Communists themselves (and blaming Ben Gurion, not Molotov, for the break with the USSR). Sneh, on the other hand, was not able to rally much support, at least not in the cities. Here and there, as in Lydda and Ramle, fist-fights between Snehists and Mapamniks for the possession of the local Mapam clubs were reported. And in Tel Aviv a new Israeli-Polish friendship league was founded that excluded Mapam—the first time it had received such treatment from an organization of that sort.

The number of Snehists in the younger kibbutzim is not large, and probably does not exceed two hundred; in the older ones it might be even less. But not a few kibbutzim, though unsympathetic to the Communists, have, out of old comradeship or for other personal reasons, refused to expel their Snehist minorities. At the same time some of Sneh's remaining friends in Mapam, like Ya'akov Riftin in the Knesset, have gone on publicly congratulating the Soviet regime for having thwarted "the diabolic intrigues of American imperialism" by the timely arrest of the Jewish doctors in Moscow. These speeches were not reported in the Mapam daily, but they found their way into the Communist newspaper, and the end result was the same. Obviously, Sneh supporters are still left in Mapam, some of them in the party's higher echelons, and they stay put for the sake of convenience or tactical reasons. But as tension between Mapam and the local Communists continues to mount their positions will become untenable.

ONE grotesque outcome of the bombing incident was the new rapprochement between Communists and Snehists on one side, and the religious parties on the other. A flirtation between these two apparently incompatible camps had started earlier, when the Communists succeeded in gathering without much effort the signatures of all but a very few of the Jerusalem rabbis and heads of *yeshivot* for a cabled petition to President Truman asking a pardon for the Rosenbergs. But why had these rabbis lent their names to an official

Communist move instead of acting independently, as the two Chief Rabbis had done in their own appeal for a pardon? Why had they never intervened similarly when Jews were sentenced to death in the past, particularly in the political trials in Communist countries? And why, finally, did they lack the courage of their own convictions?—why was the whole matter shrouded in secrecy, why was *Kol Ha'am* the only newspaper to publicize their step?

In the weeks after the bomb incident new light was shed on the relations between the Communists and the religious parties. In February, one Rabbi Grossman, a member of the Orthodox lunatic-fringe group, Neturai Karta, was sentenced to three months' imprisonment for having published a highly libellous leaflet on the Israeli army in which he attacked national service for girls (he was brought to court, incidentally, on a Mapam motion in the Knesset). The Israeli Communists saw their chance. If the Tudeh party in Persia could collaborate with Mulla Kashani, why couldn't they themselves cooperate with Neturai Karta? After all, Maki was the only non-Orthodox party to oppose national service for girls—as was logical enough, since they were against the national defense of Israel in general. And so Dr. Sneh was ordered to bring the matter up in the Knesset in the form of a joint protest by both Communists and extreme Orthodox parties.

Simultaneously, the religious parties' press began to publish strong criticism of the preparations for the all-Jewish congress that was to meet to protest against Communist anti-Semitism. The same papers also expressed violent opposition to the plan to bring Soviet anti-Semitism up at the UN. "We Jews do not use such methods," said *Hamodia*, the organ of Agudat Israel. "We resort to the means used by our ancestors to soften the hearts of their enemies." This was a reference to the *shtadlanim* of the 17th century, whose method of "softening the hearts of enemies" was to pay ransoms and bribes. *Hatzofe* (Hapoel Hamizrahi) and *Hakol* (extreme Aguda) attacked the all-Jewish protest meeting because "it will be anti-Soviet in its character." This had to be avoided by all means, because the only hope for Jews lay in appeasing the Soviets and abstaining from public criticism of them. At around the same time one of the leaders of Hapoel Hamizrahi, Y. Rafael, returning from Europe, declared that the flight of Jews from

Eastern Germany and conditions there had been greatly exaggerated—though he had to admit in his next sentence that in a single month a higher percentage of Jews had left Eastern Germany than had emigrated from Nazi Germany in any whole year after 1933. An editorial in *Hatzofe* criticized the Histadrut leaders for trying to purge the trade unions of Communist influence. Ben Gurion, a series of whose articles was being published under a pseudonym in *Davar*, was told by the same paper to show restraint in his criticism of the Communists. Actually, the tenor of these articles was extremely moderate.

THE Communist press and Dr. Sneh were overjoyed at this support from such an unexpected quarter. They distributed their praise lavishly and called for a "new government" under Agudat Israel, Dr. Abba Hillel Silver (!), and political figures of a similar complexion. The identical demand, in identical words, naming Aguda, Dr. Silver, and Herut, was made in *Al Hamishmar*, the Mapam paper, on February 27. Aguda and Dr. Silver did not stand exactly on the left, to be sure, but they had shown a much more "positive" attitude than Mapai towards Soviet Russia, and that was all that counted now according to Maki, Dr. Sneh, and Mapam.

The importance of this flirtation between the Communists and the Orthodox parties should not be overrated, nevertheless. The innate timidity of the Orthodox leaders, their inability to understand the world around them, and their utter ignorance of things Soviet and Communist was not shared by most of their own followers, who took a position that was more steadfast as well as more realistic. The whole affair showed once more what important allies of Communism ignorance and pusillanimity are, and how they create fellow-travelers in the most unexpected quarters.

Nor has this ignorance and pusillanimity been confined to Orthodox circles. One or two editorials in the influential *Ha'aretz* betrayed a similar lack of understanding of things Soviet (though the same paper has also run anti-Communist articles); and the executive of the Progressive party passed a resolution calling for "more restraint" in the speeches of Israeli ministers. At the same time it has to be admitted that there was a measure of inconsistency in the statements of government spokesmen themselves.

Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett made several speeches in January and February that would, perhaps, have been more appropriate if given by someone in a less official position. After the Russian severance of diplomatic relations, on the other hand, the Israeli Foreign Service representatives revealed in some cases a surprising amount of timidity, as well as lack of candor. Typical of this was the statement that Dr. Elyashiv, former Israeli Minister to Moscow, made in Stockholm on his way home, to the effect that the Soviet regime made a distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism—the Stalin peace prize given to Ilya Ehrenburg being his main argument. Another example of this timidity was the refusal of the Israeli Legation in Paris to make any reply to a group of young non-Communist French writers who asked for information about the anti-Jewish campaign in the USSR.

TO SUM UP, official and open anti-Semitism in Soviet Russia and her satellite states has seriously weakened Stalinism in Israel. Mapam has dissociated itself from the Prague trial at least by refusing to accept Oren's guilt or to support the Soviet charges against Jews. The party still tries to be more papal than the Cominform pope, but its inability to back the Communist line at every single point has compromised it irremediably in the eyes of Moscow. Dr. Sneh's Left Brigade remains a small and uninfluential group; its only hope lies in an early change in Russia's present attitude towards the Jews—in which case a large part of Mapam might cede and join his group. But such a development seems very unlikely; on the contrary, a further deterioration of the situation of the Jews in East Europe appears to be much more probable. Maki, the Communist party, has succeeded in holding on to most of its cadres, but it has lost most of its sympathizers in Israel.

It can be assumed that Malenkov will keep one or two Jews like Lazar Kaganovich near him, if only to show the world that his anti-Semitism is of a "new and higher type" (like the Soviet regime in general), and that the Communists in Israel will continue to deny the very existence of Soviet anti-Semitism. But even if the Soviet regime were to promulgate Nuremberg laws, some, at least, of Maki's cadres would continue to stay loyal, arguing, perhaps, that the Jews—including themselves—had to disappear in order to make way for something bigger and infinitely more important.

Future developments in Israel depend, in any case, on a variety of factors. If the Communists continue to enjoy their present unlimited freedom of action the chances are that they will concentrate more and more on the backward sections of the population, and that they will not suffer a major loss of influence. This does not mean that they should be outlawed, but only that democracy in Israel should be given the means to defend itself against its enemies, and that it need not grant the latter unlimited rights. Let us remember the Nazis under the Weimar republic.

Another important factor is, of course, American policy in the Middle East. If the Communists and the fellow-travelers can convince the public that Washington is going to "sell out" Israel and give one-sided support to the Arab states, then the Communists will be able at least to neutralize Israeli public opinion. Whatever Russia's attitude towards the Jews may be—they will then argue—we cannot afford an exclusively Washington orientation because we shall in that case have to pay the price eventually for American appeasement of Naguib, Shishakly, and the rest. This is Mapam's thesis right now, and it depends largely on Washington as to whether it will gain greater currency in the future.